

**Beneath the veneer:
Decentralisation and post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda**

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Abstract

In 2000, the Rwandan government began the phased introduction of a decentralisation programme throughout the country. The programme aimed at countering citizen's exploitation and marginalisation - a principal driver of the 1994 genocide - through broad-based participation in local development planning. This article analyses the extent to which Rwanda's evolving decentralisation process is meeting this aim. Tracking a shift in emphasis from local political participation to economic growth, it argues that increased technocratisation and centralised control combined with poor policy responsiveness and low levels of local government legitimacy are undermining post-conflict reconstruction.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Rwanda, Development, Conflict, Reconstruction, Peacebuilding, Participation

Introduction

Feted in Davos¹, host to the World Economic Forum on Africa in May last year (2016)², darling of both corporate consultants³ and world leaders alike⁴, Rwanda has emerged from the ashes of genocide to become the aid industry's African posterchild. The statistics are certainly impressive. In the last ten-year period, the country has registered average growth rates of eight per cent per annum and has reduced inflation since 2009⁵. It has received widespread praise for its economic governance reforms and low levels of corruption, making it an increasingly attractive location for inward investment⁶. Through its rapid reforms at local levels in agriculture, infrastructural developments and social service provision, the government claims to have effected a spectacular reversal in poverty and inequality in recent years⁷ and interest is growing in Rwanda as a viable new form of African developmental state⁸.

While concern has been expressed at the ruling regime's suppression of political opposition⁹, its activities in Eastern Congo¹⁰ and, most recently, the decision by President Kagame to run for a third term in 2017¹¹, Rwanda's meteoric rise as reflected through a range of development indicators is nonetheless significant and the country stands as a model for post-conflict reconstruction and development for others within the Great Lakes region and beyond¹². Decentralisation has played a large part in this remarkable story. Launched on a phased basis in 2000, the ambitious programme aimed at countering citizen's exploitation and marginalisation – a principal driver of the 1994 genocide – through broad-based participation in local development planning, building trust and cooperation across villages and enhancing local state-community relations throughout the country. Taking a historical approach, this article examines the extent to which this evolving process is managing to

achieve this. Tracking a shift in focus from local political participation to economic growth and development, research findings present evidence of increased technocratisation and centralised control over the process; a mismatch between community and local authority priorities; and low levels of local government legitimacy. As parallels with the coercive, exploitative practices of the past emerge, and pressures and demands on local communities to invest physically and financially in development priorities not of their choosing increase, it is argued that the shift in focus and approach within the decentralisation process risks pushing communities too far, increasing their marginalisation, frustration and resentment, exacerbating local tensions, and undermining post-conflict reconstruction. The findings presented here reinforce existing studies which point to centralised control of the process¹³ and add to this literature by considering the implications of this for ongoing stability and post-conflict reconstruction in the country.

The article draws on relevant policy and field research which was conducted by the author in Rwanda in February – April 2013 across six diverse rural sites in five different districts North and South of the country. The broad aim of the research was to examine the role of decentralisation in post-conflict reconstruction. Post-conflict reconstruction is understood here as a continuum of policies and programmes from the immediate post-conflict phase to the later broader phases of development. Even where states have emerged from the immediate phase of post-conflict reconstruction, they require effective interventions that can contribute to security and development together. And, as Beswick and Jackson note, *‘the key to managing this [process] is the creation of critical effective governance mechanisms in developing countries to provide where possible effective local ownership of development’*¹⁴. The project forms part of a broader programme of research on decentralisation and post-conflict reconstruction in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the

Congo (DRC), and Rwanda respectively¹⁵. Research sites, drawing on the National Institute for Statistical Research (NISR) district profiles, were selected to reflect both geographic and socio-economic diversity and include one of the wealthiest and one of the poorest districts in the country¹⁶. Logistical assistance was provided by an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) which works on governance and human rights in Rwanda for transportation, personal introductions to local authorities, and the engagement of an independent translator (translating from Kinyarwanda to French where necessary). Due to the politically sensitive nature of academic research in Rwanda, the international NGO wishes to remain anonymous. Semi-structured interviews with 99 randomly selected residents (every third woman and man encountered on transect walks through villages - 50 female; 49 male) and 23 semi-structured interviews with local authorities (nine at district level; eight at sector level; and six at cell level selected by myself) were conducted in total across the six sites. In addition, field research included a structured observation of an *umuganda* local planning session in Kigali, and semi-structured interviews with two national government officials; three NGOs; and eight international donor representatives. The methodological challenges of conducting interviews in a divided society where history is highly contested and freedom of speech limited has been discussed in detail elsewhere¹⁷. Challenges include the nature of historical memory, selective telling, and difficulties assembling representative groups. Moreover, my own positionality as a white, female researcher with links to an international NGO posed additional challenges, as did the positionality of both my NGO colleagues and translator. I attempted to mitigate some of these by selecting the officials I wished to meet myself (although this was necessarily also determined by their own availability); daily debriefings with my translator to attempt to uncover and correct for any bias; arriving unannounced to villages each day; conducting all interviews on a voluntary, one-to-one basis in private; emphasising at the outset that I did not

work for the government or any NGO; and assuring anonymity of all interviewees (no names were recorded – all interviewees were assigned a numerical code). While issues of bias and selective telling remain inevitable, I hoped that these might be minimised through these measures.

The article is structured as follows. The following section provides a historical overview and reviews the rich body of literature on the complex range of factors underpinning the genocide. Moving beyond simplistic accounts of ethnic antagonisms, it highlights in particular the psycho-sociological impacts of the acute political marginalisation and exploitation of vast swathes of the country's population by its local and national political elite and international aid actors alike through the government's decentralised structures and practices. The link between post-conflict reconstruction and decentralisation in this context is discussed in the third section where a framework for the field research is set out. Section four provides an overview of the aims and evolution of the decentralisation programme and policy. It highlights in particular its shift in focus, in the mid-2000s, from local participation in decision-making and planning to economic growth. Findings from the fieldwork are presented in Sections Five to Seven inclusive. Following the framework set out in Section Three, findings are organised into sub-sections on inclusive governance, policy responsiveness and local government legitimacy respectively. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for the country's ongoing stability.

Rwanda's genocide – the background

The horrors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide and its aftermath have been well documented. The brutal extermination of eight hundred thousand people over the space of one hundred

days has led to much interrogation and questioning – both of the international community’s lack of action in the face of such an egregious atrocity, and of the internal tensions and dynamics which underpinned it. Specifically, scholars sought to understand what could have induced such a sharp and brutal level of violence among and between seemingly peaceful neighbours and villagers. While we will never have a definitive answer to this question, a number of underlying factors and issues have been proposed. These include historic patterns of ethnic inequality; the growing economic crisis at the time; the invasion by the Rwandan Patriotic Army¹⁸; international pressure for democratisation; and the widespread use of propaganda and hate speech in the lead up to and throughout the genocide¹⁹.

While these analyses highlight many of the most salient immediate factors, a number of additional contributions provide insights into the more longstanding social dynamics underpinning the violence of the time²⁰. These variously argue that violence was an endemic, structural process in Rwanda pre-1994 characterised by longstanding dynamics of exclusion, marginalisation, inequality and frustration. These dynamics, scholars argue, were promoted by national and local state and aid officials alike and they resulted in profound and deep-seated social and psychological effects. While such levels of prejudice and condescension are common in many African (and non-African) states and societies, what perhaps sets Rwanda apart is the combination of these with the omnipotence of the state and its intrusion into all aspects of social life at the time. As others have cogently argued²¹, it was the strength and not the weakness or fragility of the Rwandan state that was central to the genocide. And one of the principal vehicles for the institutionalised coercion, manipulation and exploitation of the local population was the country’s decentralisation process which, although designed to promote local-level, participatory development planning and project implementation at commune level, in reality served to promote centralised interests and plans²².

With each commune run by a *Bourgmestre* whose position resembled that of the local chiefs prior to the 1959 revolution, and with local civic associations closely aligned to the state, the entire decentralised structure operated in a tightly controlled top-down manner through a complex network of formal and informal committees and institutions. A quote from a UN report in the early 1990s is illustrative of the degree of vertical authoritarianism of the era, *‘Without prior consultation, authorities do not hesitate to communicate, during Sunday mass, the weekly calendar: reception of visitors, meetings of the sectoral or the cell sub-committee [local subdivisions of the single party], work in the coffee plantations, obligatory labour on roads, etc.’*²³. A number of scholars highlight the role of these decentralised authorities in, not just in the routine coercion and exploitation of local communities through the extraction of physical labour and taxes in the official drive to meet ambitious development targets, but also in disseminating central orders and directing the genocidal violence and killing within their jurisdictions in 1994²⁴.

Given the current popularity of Rwanda as a ‘donor darling’²⁵, it is worth highlighting that Rwanda in this pre-genocide period was also widely perceived as a development success story. As Peter Uvin notes²⁶ *‘The image of Rwanda created by the development community was an idyllic one. In brief, it was the image of a country of subsistence farmers faced with daunting economic and demographic challenges but endowed with a government that followed the right policies, the fruits of which the hardworking population enjoyed’*. Yet falling coffee prices coupled with growing land and income inequalities²⁷ pointed to acute and rising inequality during this time. Moreover women, who in the precolonial era exerted a degree of influence in their roles as mothers and food producers, were subjugated and

regarded as inferior to men²⁸. Thus, according to a number of accounts of the period, while on the surface Rwanda appeared the model of a modern, developmental state, achieving impressive development targets and creating a modern infrastructure for local enterprise and development, this came at a price. Scratching beneath the surface it appears that this impressive veneer masked a growing frustration and anger among the local population with the coercive and exploitative decentralised state apparatus, keen to meet ambitious development targets at seemingly any cost, exacting a significant physical and psychological toll on rural communities. As we will see, while these costs were initially acknowledged by the new post-genocide regime when designing the current decentralisation programme, the transition in focus in the mid-2000s from local political participation to fast-track economic growth and development signals a regression to the authoritarian, coercive apparatus of the past.

Post-conflict reconstruction and decentralisation

Much of the early literature in the field of post-conflict reconstruction drew from a liberal framework which, aimed primarily at stabilisation, focused on political and economic liberalisation. Within this framework, reconstruction efforts focused on national level initiatives such as the elaboration of elite, power-sharing agreements, the organisation of elections, and the promotion of economic growth through liberalised market-based economies²⁹. The relative failure of such liberal prescriptions in many countries however, has led to much questioning and critique, and more recent contributions highlight the need for more contextualised, country-specific understandings conflict. Arguing that liberal frameworks only serve to reinforce the hegemonic status quo, leaving its inherent inequalities and selective privileges to a ruling elite intact, much of this more recent literature focuses in

particular on the local drivers of conflict, in particular the marginalisation and exploitation (real or perceived) of different groups and communities³⁰.

Focusing on these key drivers, which include poverty and inequality as well as political manipulation and exclusion³¹ and, in line with this local turn, post-conflict reconstruction initiatives which promote more inclusive access to resources and institutions, which devolve power and voice to more marginalised groups and communities, and which end discrimination against particular groups, including women, are promoted. In this context, reconstruction efforts now often include longer term policies and programmes in the areas of local governance and decentralisation. Recognising that national elites tend to revert to strategies that reproduce their positions of power, the aim behind local governance reforms and decentralisation programmes is to dilute these strategies, devolving power and authority to heretofore marginalised actors and communities³². In this context, analysts argue that decentralisation can mitigate conflict at local levels by placing limits on the power of the centre through mechanisms of inclusive governance, thereby affording some degree of local autonomy. This, the argument goes, enhances service delivery and government responsiveness to the needs and priorities of local communities which, in turn, increases state legitimacy and support at local levels³³.

This elite monopolisation of power and privilege referred to in the broader literature, strongly resonates with the socio-political climate in Rwanda pre-1994. As we have seen in the previous section, this constituted one of the key drivers of the subsequent genocide. In the following section we see that the country's current decentralisation programme was developed with these drivers in mind and, on paper at least, with the ambition of reversing the marginalising and exploitative policies and practices of the past, thereby increasing local

government responsiveness. Bearing in mind that the normative ideals of decentralisation do not always live up to its practice and experience³⁴, the remainder of this article focuses on the degree to which Rwanda's evolving process is doing so. Drawing its framework from the relevant literature explored above, it explores the aims of the programme; local mechanisms for inclusive governance; policy responsiveness to local priorities; and community's knowledge and use of local government structures.

Decentralisation and reconstruction in Rwanda: Shifting priorities

The normative potential of decentralisation for post-conflict reconstruction appeared to be recognised by the new Rwandan regime when it introduced its ambitious decentralisation programme in 2000 following a period of relative flux after the genocide. The 2001 *Decentralisation Policy* succinctly captures the inter-related problems of previous decentralised regimes including the inadequate participation of the population in decision-making; inadequate financial resources at lower levels; lack of accountability and transparency in local management structures; a passivity and dependency among the population caused by excessive centralisation; and '*an officialdom which erodes further the people's say in the management of their affairs, the system being generally accountable to central government instead of being accountable to the people*'³⁵. The resultant aim of the new decentralisation programme was thus to transform this system, affording citizens a voice in their own communities' development. '*The overall objective of the decentralization policy is to ensure political, economic, social, managerial/administrative and technical empowerment of local populations to fight poverty by participating in planning and management of their development process*'³⁶. The new programme therefore placed the substantive participation of Rwanda's local communities at its very core.

The aim was to introduce this new form of decentralisation over a phased basis. Phase I (2000-2005) introduced territorial reform. Sous-prefectures were abolished and communes were replaced by districts which were further sub-divided into sectors and cells respectively. Phase I also introduced *ubudehe* – a local, participatory planning process involving social mapping, poverty categorisation and prioritisation of development activities and projects by communities themselves (see the following section). The principal aim of decentralisation at this time was stated to be the promotion of reconciliation and social reconstruction across the country³⁷.

More sweeping territorial reform was introduced in Phase II (2006-2010). In January 2006, the number of provinces was reduced from 11 to 4; of districts (from 106 to 30); of sectors (from 1,545 to 416) and of cells (from 9,201 to 2,148)³⁸. Boundaries were redrawn and most localities and major towns took on new names, some of which were inspired by pre-colonial Rwanda³⁹. The administrative roles of these territorial entities were also redefined during this phase by removing the autonomy of provinces and transferring the principal coordinating and financial functions to the districts. A new administrative structure, the *umudugudu* – village or agglomeration created through the government's controversial villagisation policy⁴⁰ (also known as *umudugudu*) – was also introduced during this phase. Notably, this phase witnessed a concerted shift from political to administrative functions with a marked emphasis on increasing the administrative capacity of local authorities as the aim of decentralisation shifted from reconciliation to economic growth and development⁴¹. A series of local elections was held throughout the country in 2006.

The third and current phase (2011-2016) aims “...to deepen and sustain grassroots-based democratic governance and promote equitable local development by enhancing citizen participation and strengthening the local government system, while maintaining effective functional and mutually accountable linkages between Central and Local Governments entities.”⁴².

While the rhetoric of citizen participation continues to imbue the policy and programme, a significant shift has occurred in aim and emphasis. This is perhaps most clearly reflected in the revised *Decentralisation Policy*. This version, revised in 2013, reveals some fundamental changes in both the aim of the process and in the roles and responsibilities of its different actors. Although the core concept of local participation in local decision-making is again reiterated within this, the broader tenor and content reflects a shift from the broader original goals of post-conflict reconstruction to more narrowly defined goals of economic growth and development, drawing on communities’ own resources for this. This is reflected in the third objective which aims ‘to **fast-track and sustain equitable local economic development as a basis for enhancing local fiscal autonomy, employment and poverty reduction, by empowering local communities and local governments to explore and utilize local potentials, prioritise and proactively engage in economic transformation activities at local, national and regional levels, and ensure fiscal discipline.**’⁴³. The revised policy also envisages a greater role for central authorities in local planning. While the 2001 policy stressed the importance of decentralised, local planning – as set out in objectives (iii) ‘to develop planning, financing, management and control of service provision at the point where services are provided’ and (iv) ‘to develop planning at local levels’, the revised policy proves somewhat ambiguous in this regard. While on the one hand, its first objective reiterates the commitment to substantive citizen participation in local planning – ‘To enhance and sustain citizens’

*participation in initiating, making, implementing, monitoring and evaluating decisions and plans that affect them by transferring power, authority and resources from central to local government and lower levels, and ensuring that all levels have adequate capacities and motivations to promote genuine participation.*⁴⁴, its fourth objective introduces the concept of joint planning between central and local authorities with delivery and implementation alone left to local levels – ‘*To enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the planning, monitoring, and delivery of services by promoting joint development planning between central and local governments and ensuring that service delivery responsibilities and corresponding public expenditure are undertaken at the lowest levels possible.*⁴⁵. Thus, overall, while retaining some commitment to local participation, the revised *Decentralisation Policy* reflects an increased emphasis on local economic growth, fiscal autonomy, and participation as cost-sharing via volunteerism, communal labour and increased local taxation. This means increasing physical and financial demands on communities which, in turn, further strain local relations and risk jeopardising any fragile social contract forged in the immediate post-conflict period.

The government’s vision for the role of communities in local development is further reflected in the *Community Development Policy*, first developed in 2001 and revised in 2008. In echoes of the pre-genocide discourse of the mobilisation of communities as engines of local development, participation is framed as participation in local development work rather than decision-making. And so, ‘*Local communities hold the key to sustainable development. They have the capacity to take charge of their own development and hence their effective participation is indispensable. Participation should be mobilised and concentrated at the lowest operational - Umudugudu level.*’⁴⁶. Participation as cost-sharing rather than a more substantive, political form of participation appears to be what is in mind. This is confirmed

as the policy progresses, with the reminder that *'The Community Development Policy is based on the constitutional principles where the citizen has an obligation to use his labour to contribute to the prosperity of the country (Article 47 of the revised constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 4th June 2003).'*⁴⁷.

Taken together therefore, these somewhat subtle and at times ambiguous shifts in policy over time appear to suggest that, while the decentralisation programme initially purported to aim at breaking with the top-down, manipulative structures and practices of the past, by placing citizen participation in local planning and decision-making at its heart, as time has evolved, increasing centralist tendencies and growing pressures and demands on communities to meet ambitious development targets echo these manipulative structures and practices of the past. This is evidenced in an increased emphasis within the relevant policies on participation as communal labour (now enshrined within Article 47 of the revised Constitution) and increased local taxation aimed at achieving local fiscal autonomy. In addition, a greater influence of central authorities in planning is apparent within the new climate of 'fast-track' economic development and there is a reduced emphasis on local planning and decision-making.

While this is evident in policy, its manifestation in practice and, importantly, the implications of these developments for post-conflict construction and social and political stability in the country more broadly remain under-explored. In particular, it remains to be seen if the increased demands on local communities are yielding outcomes which respond to their needs – i.e. if decentralisation, although now centrally devised and imposed, is responsive to local needs and priorities. In addition, the quality of relations between local authorities and communities remains to be explored. These aspects are the focus of the following section.

Shifting priorities and post-conflict reconstruction within communities

The following subsections draw on fieldwork to explore the implications of these shifting government priorities for ongoing stability and reconstruction in the country. Following the normative aspirations set out in the literature reviewed in Section Three, fieldwork explored levels of inclusivity and participation in local decision-making structures; programme and policy responsiveness to local priorities; and community knowledge of and engagement with local authorities and structures. This latter aspect was explored as a proxy for local government legitimacy on the assumption that high levels of voluntary engagement with and knowledge of these structures would indicate a level of legitimacy. The findings set out below demonstrate increased centralisation and control over local decision-making; a poor level of policy and programme responsiveness; and low levels of legitimacy for local government authorities and structures.

Inclusive local governance mechanisms

Two practices were developed to assure local participation in planning and decision-making in phase I of the programme - *ubudehe* and *umuganda* respectively. Developments within these are outlined in turn below.

Ubudehe

Ubudehe, described by the Ministry of Local Government as ‘*the traditional Rwandan practice and cultural value of working together to solve problems*’⁴⁸, was developed in the early 2000s as a local planning mechanism. Involving a four step process (household classification (assigning households to wealth/poverty-based *ubudehe* categories); local resource mapping; problem prioritisation; and action planning, the process has been hailed as

genuinely participative and democratic⁴⁹. Today however, little remains of the original process. Resource maps, once available for consultation in the offices of local authorities, are now archived in Kigali and deliberations on problem prioritisation and resolution are, for all interviewed for this research, a dim and distant memory. *Ubudehe* now encompasses the first step only – household categorisation (on a 1-7 scale where 1 is the poorest and 7 the most affluent). Final decisions on these categories now rest with local authorities. Moreover, following the elaboration of a national database of statistics from *ubudehe* data in December 2010, the government is now linking welfare payments and tax obligations to *ubudehe* categories. Category 1 and 2 households receive some welfare payments through a donor funded scheme called VUP⁵⁰ and their mandatory public health insurance payments are waived. Category 3 households receive no welfare assistance and must pay an annual health insurance premium of RwFr 3,000 (approx. 3.62 USD) per household member, with this rising to RwFr 7,000 (approx.. 8.47 USD) for Category 4 households.

The consequences of this technocratisation of *ubudehe* are two-fold. First, with resource availability now the guiding factor in household categorisation, an ‘upgrading’ of households to Category 3 where they lose their VUP assistance and become liable for taxes is apparent. While the most common category among the 99 interviewees (42 per cent) was Category 2 in 2012, 2013 saw a significant increase (up to 64 per cent) of households in Category 3. Overall, 31 per cent of interviewees’ households were moved up a category while just 2 per cent were moved down one following the linking of these categories to resources. Second, there is evidence of considerable dissatisfaction with these new classifications. Overall, 49 per cent of interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with their classification. Comparing across research sites, a correlation is apparent between levels of satisfaction and lower level categorisations. For example in Site A in the North, where 70 per cent of interviewees are in

Categories 1 or 2, 80 per cent are satisfied with their categorisation. Contrarily, in Site E in the South, where 73 per cent of interviewees are in Category 3, 82 per cent of interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with their categorisation. While, given the small sample size, these figures in no way reflect overall *ubudehe* categorisations in the sites sampled or indeed nationally, the findings do suggest a growing dissatisfaction with the state's increasing financial demands. The regional variations (between North and South) in these findings may be politically significant given the historical socio-geographic division of the country. It is interesting to note that the propensity for category 'upgrading' (and attendant liability for taxation) is lower in the North – the Hutu dominated region which, both in 1959-1963 and again in 1994 vigorously contested Tutsi control⁵¹. Thus, this *ubudehe* manipulation may serve as a means to appease a historically oppositional North. On the other hand, it may also simply reflect its higher levels of poverty and marginalisation. As to *ubudehe*'s demise as a local planning mechanism, local officials and quite a number of civil society representatives argue that its spirit continues in the dialogue, discussions and planning sessions which take place at monthly *umuganda* meetings. This is discussed below.

Umuganda

Umuganda refers to the tradition, prevalent in the Great Lakes region since the colonial era, of obligatory communal labour on public projects. In Rwanda, *umuganda* labour works officially take place on the last Saturday of every month when, following the communal labour, meetings are held where community issues and plans are debated and agreed upon. This represents a significant difference to pre-genocide *umuganda* processes where no discussions took place. The issues raised at these *umuganda* meetings, officials stress, feed upward to cell, sector, and district plans with, every five years, a formal upward-planning

process taking place for the development of the District Development Plan (DDP). Yet none of the local officials interviewed were able to outline precisely how competing or contrasting demands are addressed or how local priorities are decided upon for these DPPs. At district level, national (EDPRS) and international (MDG) frameworks were cited as important in setting development objectives, yet the link to local priorities remains opaque. A representative from one of the donor agencies supporting decentralisation claims that the current 5-yearly district planning process, tellingly coordinated this time round by the Ministry of Finance rather than the Ministry of Local Government as is the norm, was conducted in considerable haste and constituted merely a desk-based exercise with no field visits or use of local plans of any sort⁵².

Although the link between *umuganda* discussions and the district planning process appears weak or non-existent therefore, discussions do indeed take place following the completion of communal labour. The form of communication acts (instructing, questioning, proposing, advocating, criticising etc.) and the discourses employed demonstrate the increasingly centralising tendencies of local governance. A structured observation of an *umuganda* session in a residential neighbourhood in Kigali confirmed interviewees' assertions that the main purpose of these meetings is to instruct residents on the latest centrally-driven development plans and their roles and responsibilities within these. Taking place outside the local government authority's office following several hours of communal work clearing ditches, seven local officials and approximately 300 community members attended. Over its 50 minutes' duration, officials spoke for 40 with their contributions centring on the announcement of a series of new taxes (for refuse collection and school building maintenance) and fines and penalties (for failing to attend or to bring a hoe to monthly *umuganda* sessions). The meeting also included interventions from 12 community members

(10 men, 2 women), with six of these insisting on the right to speak as the chair tried to bring proceedings to a close. Nine of these community interventions were complaints about the new taxes, two related to a local theft and the final one was a proposal (rejected as it is not in the district plan) to use next month's *umuganda* work to repair the local bridge. Overall, the substance, tenor and tone of local authority contributions stifled rather than facilitated debate and revealed paternalistic attitudes and disciplinary intent as officials repeatedly stressed the responsibility of all to contribute, rebuking those who questioned local government plans. As noted by a number of interviewees with whom this observation was discussed, it is likely that levels of both community dissent and officials' tolerance levels for these are lower in rural areas. However, as travel is prohibited on *umuganda* days, efforts to attend a session at one of the research sites were thwarted at the first road block.

Taken together, the two principal practices of local participation in planning and decision-making do indicate significant breaks from the past when citizens were afforded no space to express their views and opinions and dissent was not tolerated in any form. Both *ubudehe* and *umuganda* represent new structures with the express purpose of providing a space for citizen voice. However, the practice of employing these new spaces as spaces for 'sensitisation' and instruction on top-down directives rather than as spaces for deliberation and shared decision-making sharply resonate with practices of the past, and relations with local authorities – key to post conflict reconstruction – may be coming under increasing strain. In the following two sections we examine these relations more closely, first through an examination of local authority responsiveness in addressing local priorities and needs; and second through an examination of communities' use of and engagement with local authorities in both resolving local conflicts and in addressing problems with services.

Policy and programme responsiveness

Proponents of decentralisation as an effective element of post-conflict reconstruction emphasise its role in increasing the effectiveness and responsiveness of policy and programming in addressing local priorities and needs. In this section community priorities – explored with individual residents – are compared with those outlined by local officials where the latter form the basis of local policy and programming.

As detailed in the previous section, the decentralised practices of *ubudehe* and *umuganda*, in theory, facilitate community participation in the identification of local priorities and issues. These, the theory goes, are then fed upward through cell, sector and district planning processes and form the basis of both the DDPs and prioritised activities at more local levels. Following this process, we could expect to see a high degree of congruence between priorities identified by residents and local authorities. Across the six sites, residents were asked an open question of what constitute the most important issues for them in order to have peace and contentment in life. A second question aimed at eliciting the same information inversely explored what the causes of absolute misery are. Across the same sites, officials at district, sector and cell levels were asked to rank, in order of importance, the main priorities for communities within their jurisdictions. The resultant coded and collated data is synopsised in Table 1 below. Number one in each column indicates the collective top-ranked issue, number two the second, and so on. While the findings for residents indicate a clear-cut collective ranking (seven issues, each with its individual ranking), officials' (at cell, sector and district levels) collective rankings show an equal priority for some issues. For example,

cell leaders collectively ranked domestic conflict and violence, food security and land consolidation, and cell office construction as equal priorities in fourth place.

Table 1: Resident and authorities' priorities compared

Priority	Residents	Cell leaders	Sector leaders	District leaders
No domestic violence	1	4	3	-
Food security / access to land	2	4 (consolidatn)	1 (consolidatn)	1 (consolidatn)
Health services	3	1 (<i>mutuelle</i>)	2 (<i>mutuelle</i>)	-
Children in school	4	-	1	-
Decent clothing	5	-	-	-
To have an income	6	-	-	-
Security / peace	7	-	-	3
Family planning	-	2	-	-
Savings and credit facilities	-	3	1	1
Building a cell office	-	4	-	-
Hygiene & sanitation	-		3	
Roads	-	-	-	1
ICT and computer literacy	-	-	-	2
Electricity	-	-	-	3

For residents interviewed, the top three issues (in order of priority - domestic conflict and violence; food security and land access; and access to health services (denied for those who fail to pay their annual health premium)) reflect the multidimensionality of poverty and its effects on psychological as well as physical wellbeing. For local officials, the top three issues (collection of annual health insurance premiums from all households; family planning (for population control); and the development of local savings and credit cooperatives) display an adherence to the national government's priorities and programmes⁵³. Indeed, local officials note that a failure to meet 80 per cent of their targets (which, drawing from national priorities, include these three issues) means they lose their jobs, so clearly the pressures are immense.

Overall, while the findings do indicate some degree of congruency between community and local authority priorities (residents' top three priorities of domestic conflict / violence, food security, and health are all reflected in the priorities of cell and sector leaders), significant differences exist in how these issues are framed, and thus, in the solutions proposed. For example, while domestic conflicts arising from, *inter alia*, acute income poverty, stress and unequal power relations, constitute a key issue for residents, such conflicts are identified as a priority for local authorities only in so far as they impact negatively on centrally driven targets including agricultural productivity and primary educational enrolment rates⁵⁴. Moreover, it is doubtful that the solutions proposed by officials – 'regularisation' of marriages⁵⁵ and instructing couples not to fight – will address the complex relational issues underlying this problem. Indeed, as other analysts have noted⁵⁶, the technocratic and formulaic implementation of the country's much heralded gender equality policies within the framework of a narrow economic rationale has minimal impact on local gender norms, practices and relations, particularly in the context of the state's co-option of the once vibrant women's movement. Thus, while the findings indicate some level of congruence in priorities at cell and sector levels, the responses proposed are more aimed at meeting national growth targets than meeting local needs.

Local government legitimacy

On the assumption that levels of voluntary engagement with and knowledge of local government structures and authorities constitute an indication of a level of legitimacy, interviews with local residents sought to explore these factors. Interviewees, asked to identify the principal role of village level authorities, cited (though with significant gender differences) three main roles. Thirty-six per cent of interviewees (52 per cent male; 22 per cent female) cited their principle role as being to direct and instruct the population by

organising *umuganda* communal works, transferring orders from the top authorities, and reporting upwards to these. Thirty-four per cent of interviewees (22 per cent male; 44 per cent female) cited their principal role as being local conflict resolution and solving local problems. A further 15 per cent (11 per cent male; 19 per cent female) cited both of these roles, while the remaining 15 per cent (equal male and female) cited local security as being their principal role. Thus, the role of local authorities is perceived to be three-fold – to direct the community in carrying out orders from higher level authorities (principally male participants); to resolve local conflicts and disputes (principally female participants); and to assure local security (male and female participants).

Asked about the role of district level authorities, 58 per cent of interviewees (48 per cent male; 66 per cent female) professed to not knowing at all. Twenty-two per cent of interviewees (30 per cent male; 16 per cent female) suggested that they are there to ‘solve problems’ which are not solved at village or cell level; 10 per cent (7 per cent male; 13 per cent female) to carry out local development; 8.5 per cent (15 per cent male; 3 per cent female) to report to higher authorities; and 2 per cent (all female) for local security.

Interviewees were also asked if they knew anything about their district budget. 97 per cent (equal male and female) responded that no, they have never heard of this, while 2 per cent (all male) claim to have heard it mentioned in meetings. One per cent (all female) declined to respond. These findings suggest a low level of knowledge of the role of district authorities – particularly among women, thereby suggesting a low level of legitimacy and trust.

Although 58 per cent of interviewees were unsure of the role of district authorities, all interviewees had views on the role of their local, village level authorities as reflected above.

Interviewees were asked, given these roles, how often they have gone to their local authorities with an issue to be resolved. Despite a relatively high level of knowledge of their role combined with their physical proximity, 58 per cent (63 per cent male; 53 per cent female) of interviewees have never approached their local authorities with an issue. This percentage is particularly high in both Site A in the North (70 per cent) and in Site E in the South (73 per cent). The gender difference in this overall finding is somewhat consistent with the finding reported above where more women than men see their role in local conflict resolution, while more men than women see their role as transferring orders from and reporting to higher level authorities. Of those that have consulted their local authorities, seven per cent (all women) have sought assistance in resolving domestic disputes/violence; three per cent (all women) have gone to seek financial assistance as their family were starving; and two per cent (all women) have gone to report theft from their homes. A further 14 per cent (15 per cent male; 13 per cent female) have brought land dispute issues for resolution to local authorities; 10 per cent (15 per cent male; 6 per cent female) have gone to seek assistance in resolving disputes with neighbours while 7 per cent (7 per cent male; 6 per cent female) have gone to get official papers (to the Cell leader).

It is noteworthy that local authorities are not associated with the provision of local services despite this being a stated aim of the decentralisation programme as well as, as we have seen in Section Three, an important component of post-conflict reconstruction programmes.

Asked how problems with local services (water provision, healthcare, road erosion etc.) are addressed within local communities, 46 per cent of interviewees (48 per cent male; 44 per cent female) noted that they abandon the service or find an alternative, while a further 5 per cent (all women) said they did not know what to do when services broke down. 44 per cent (equal male and female) said that they go to the local village leader who organises an

umuganda to fix the service. These findings illustrate that over half of all interviewees do not associate local authorities with service provision. This is particularly prevalent in Site D where all interviewees reported that they abandon the service and in Site F where 87 per cent of interviewees abandon the service.

These overall findings are somewhat mirrored in the findings in relation to how local conflicts are resolved. 64 per cent of interviewees overall (63 per cent male; 65 per cent female) attempt to resolve local disputes themselves, between families and/or neighbours without involving the local authorities. 32 per cent (30 per cent male; 34 per cent female) involve the village leader while a further 4 per cent (all male) consult another authority either from the church or from a local NGO. Overall these findings indicate a relatively low level of active consultation with local authorities in relation to two of their identified core areas of work. On the one hand this might indicate that, contrary to suggestions of a passive citizenry, local communities are well capable of resolving issues and getting on with their lives themselves and that strong and relatively effective systems of local dispute resolution are in place despite the damage caused by the genocide. On the other, it may also be indicative of a strong distrust of and a low level of legitimacy for local authorities and institutions – something both Desrosier and Thomson and the IRDP also assert to be the case⁵⁷.

The findings also demonstrate strong continuities with the past, with citizens associating local authorities, more strongly than anything else, with organising *umuganda* communal labour and transferring the orders and directives from higher authorities downward to citizens. This echoes local authority practices in the pre-1994 era, and stands in stark contrast to the more accountable, responsive one promoted within official rhetoric. At district level, the findings

are unequivocal in pointing toward a very low level of awareness of the role and work of district level authorities and practically no awareness of budgetary priorities or plans.

Overall, the findings reported in this section highlight relatively poor levels of political inclusion and policy responsiveness and are, in the main, strongly reflective of the more authoritarian and centralist form of leadership exerted in the pre-1994 era, together with a highly technocratic approach to development more broadly. While undoubtedly effective in driving the country's impressive macro-level growth and development, the strong historic resonances emanating from the research findings should perhaps give some pause for thought when considered in a historic context.

Conclusion: Decentralisation reconfigured - What implications for Rwanda's future stability?

The aim of this research was to explore the evolving role of decentralisation in Rwanda's post-conflict reconstruction. Tracking changes in both policy and in local participatory mechanisms, the evidence presented has demonstrated a shift in focus over time, from local political participation to fast-track economic growth and development. This has entailed increased centralisation and technocratisation of the process, together with increased demands on communities. These findings support those of other researchers on various aspects of the process and highlight parallels with the past in relation to the pre-genocide regime's policies and practices of decentralisation.

It could be argued that such developments are not, in and of themselves, a bad thing however. After all, there is no evidence of residents clamouring to be involved in local decision-making and macro-level indicators, although plateauing, remain impressive. Indeed, in many ways the Rwandan process is a good example of a “good enough” governance mechanism and feeds nicely into the current donor vogue for “what works in Africa”⁵⁸. However, when considered in the broader context of post-conflict reconstruction and stability, the additional evidence presented here is of immediate relevance. Findings which demonstrate a mismatch between community and local authority priorities coupled with low levels of local government legitimacy suggest that the reality of decentralisation in contemporary Rwanda represents more a continuity than a break with the past. And, as the findings on decentralisation from other jurisdictions demonstrate, this does not bode well for the country’s ongoing stability and reconstruction as a number of the key factors which support post-conflict reconstruction – notably a devolution in power; more inclusive local governance; enhanced local policy responsiveness; and increased local government legitimacy – are being increasingly undermined.

At a time when post-conflict reconstruction success stories are hard to come by and political authorities and constituents in donor countries increasingly difficult to placate, Rwanda stands as a beacon of hope for Africa and the aid industry alike. Against a backdrop of escalating violence and suffering in neighbouring Burundi and DRC, the images, messages and statistics promulgated by the Kigali regime prove tantalising and alluring. Yet, like the many domestic conflicts which play out under the shiny tin roofs glinting in the sun in villages throughout the country, we should remember that shiny, modern veneers can mask deeper problems. And we should remember that the international aid community has been blinded by such veneers before. As parallels with the coercive, exploitative practices of the

past emerge, and pressures and demands on local communities to invest physically and financially in development priorities not of their choosing increase, the tentative social contract forged over twenty years ago may well be under threat. The challenge now for adherents and proponents of decentralisation is to learn from and not replicate history.

Notes

¹ See for example <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/article/2015-01-21/185174/>, accessed February 9th, 2016.

² <http://www.weforum.org/events/world-economic-forum-on-africa-2016>, accessed February 10th, 2016.

³ See Crisafulli and Redmond, *Rwanda Inc.: How a devastated nation became an economic model for the developing world*.

⁴ Kagame has been heralded as a ‘visionary leader’ by former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. In 2009, he was presented with the Clinton Global Citizen Award by former US President Bill Clinton and, that same year, both *Time* magazine and the *Financial Times* named him as one of the 50 most influential people of the new millennium. Several scholars have also highlighted the remarkable achievements of the Kagame regime – see Golooba-Mutedi, “Collapse, war and reconstruction in Rwanda”, Ensign and Bertrand, *Rwanda: History and Hope*, Stansell, “The aftermath and after”, and Clark, *The Gacaca Courts: Post-Genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda*.

⁵ See, for example, the IMF’s November 2015 Public Information Notice (PIN) <https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2015/pr15494.htm>, accessed February 9th, 2016.

⁶ World Bank, *Doing Business 2013*, 37–41.

⁷ Government of Rwanda, *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2013–2018*. Caution is advised in interpreting these statistics – see Ansoms et al, “Statistics versus livelihoods”.

⁸ See, for example, Booth and Golooba-Mutedi, “Developmental Patrimonialism? The case of Rwanda” and Gaynor, “‘A Nation in a Hurry’: The costs of local governance reforms in Rwanda”.

⁹ Ansoms, “Rwanda’s post-genocide economic reconstruction”, Desrosiers and Thomson, “Rhetorical legacies of leadership”, Purdekova, “Even if I am not here, there are so many eyes: surveillance and state reach in Rwanda”, Reyntjens, “Rwanda, Ten Years On: From Genocide to Dictatorship”, and Straus, *The Order of Genocide*. Other commentators highlight the high level of centralised control over the media, information and narratives on the Rwandan story more broadly (Beswick, “Managing dissent in a post-genocide environment: the challenge of political space in Rwanda”, Ingelaere, “Do we understand life after genocide?” and Pottier, *Re-imagining Rwanda*).

¹⁰ Prunier, *From Genocide to Continental War*, Reyntjens, *The Great African War: The Congolese conflict and the crisis of contemporary Africa*, and UNSC, *Letter dated 18th May, 2012*.

¹¹ See “US slates Rwanda’s Paul Kagame over decision to run for third term”, *The Financial Times*, January 3rd, 2016 (available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/6ec7a58a-b20f-11e5-8358-9a82b43f6b2f.html#axzz3ztNjVNLp>, accessed February 9th, 2016) and “U.S., EU reject Kagame’s third term bid”, *The Guardian*, January 4th, 2016 (available at <http://www.nguardiannews.com/2016/01/u-s-eu-reject-kagames-third-term-bid/>, accessed February 9th, 2016).

¹² Study tours to Rwanda of local government officials from neighbouring Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been organised and sponsored by international donors (author interviews Burundi, September 2011 and the DRC, January 2013).

¹³ Much of the literature focuses on the lack of local participation in planning and decision-making. Both the Rwandan IRDP, which talks of “ongoing centrist tendencies” (*La Participation Citoyenne: Un des Enjeux de la Democratization au Rwanda*, 27) and the Ministry for Local Government itself (MINALOC, *Revised Decentralisation Policy*, 18) highlight the low levels of local participation in planning. On specific aspects of the process, Hasselskog demonstrates how household performance targets are set by state actors (“Participation or what?”); Hasselskog and Schierenbeck show how local communal labour projects are determined by the state (“National policy in local practice: the case of Rwanda”) while Sabates-Wheeler et al demonstrate centralised control over local poverty classifications (“Challenges of measuring graduation in Rwanda”). Chemouni’s

broader study of the administrative, financial and political aspects of the process reveals strong centralising tendencies at all three levels (“Explaining the design of the Rwandan decentralisation”).

¹⁴ Beswick and Jackson, *Conflict, Security and Development*, 9.

¹⁵ See also Gaynor, “Poverty amid plenty: Structural violence and local governance in Western Congo”; Gaynor, “Challenges to decentralisation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Beyond the political settlement”; Gaynor, “A Nation in a Hurry’: The costs of local governance reforms in Rwanda”; Gaynor, “Supporting Decentralisation in Fragile States: A View from Burundi”.

¹⁶ It was not possible to select for ethnic difference or to explore ethnic issues more broadly within the research as legislation introduced in 2008 now renders any discussion or mention of ethnicity a criminal offence (charges include ‘divisionism’, ‘negationism’ and ‘genocide ideology’ – see Waldorf, *Instrumentalising Genocide*). This would have provided a clear rationale for Rwandan authorities to deny the research visa which is now required of all foreign researchers and which proved extremely difficult to secure in this case.

¹⁷ Burnet, *Genocide Lives in Us*; Holmes, *Women and War in Rwanda*; King, “From data problems to data points”.

¹⁸ Led by Paul Kagame, the RPA invaded in 1990 leading to a civil war. Once victorious, the RPA became known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and remains the ruling party to date.

¹⁹ Des Forges, *Leave None to tell the Story*; Ensign and Bertrand, *Rwanda: History and Hope*; Pottier, *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century*; Reyntjens, *The Great African War*; Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda*; and Uvin, *Aiding Violence*.

²⁰ Des Forges, *Leave None to tell the Story*; Reyntjens, “Rwanda, Ten Years On”; Uvin, *Aiding Violence*.

²¹ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 genocide in Rwanda”; Storey, “Structural adjustment, state power and genocide”.

²² Reyntjens, “Chiefs and Burgomasters in Rwanda: The Unfinished Quest for Bureaucracy”; Ingelaere, “The Ruler’s Drum and the People’s Shout”.

²³ Quoted in Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 130.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Genocide in Rwanda, April-May 1994”; Reyntjens, *L’Afrique des Grands Lacs en Crise: Rwanda, Burundi: 1988-1994*; Uvin, *Aiding Violence*; Ingelaere “Do we understand life after genocide?”; Prunier, *From Genocide to Continental War*.

²⁵ Hayman, “Funding Fraud? Donors and Democracy in Rwanda.”

²⁶ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 42.

²⁷ Hintjens, “Explaining the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.”; Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*; Uvin, *Aiding Violence*.

²⁸ Longman, “Rwanda: Achieving Equality or Serving an Authoritarian State”.

²⁹ Carment, “Assessing state failure: implications for theory and policy”; Ottoway, “Rebuilding state institutions in collapsed states”; Paris, *At War’s End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*.

³⁰ Engelbert and Tull, “Post-conflict reconstruction in Africa: Flawed ideas about Failed States”, Richmond, *Peace in International Relations*; World Bank, *Conflict, Security and Development*.

³¹ Stewart, *Horizontal inequalities and conflict: Understanding group violence in multi-ethnic societies*; World Bank, *Conflict, Security and Development*.

³² Crook, “Decentralisation and poverty reduction in Africa”, Devas and Delay “Local democracy and the Challenges of decentralising the state”.

³³ Brinkerhoff, *Governance in Post-Conflict Societies: Rebuilding Fragile States*, Cammack et al, *Donors and the 'Fragile States' Agenda*; World Bank, *Conflict, Security and Development*.

³⁴ See for example Chanie's study of the Ethiopian process where he concludes that decentralisation remains unsuccessful due to ongoing political clientelism, "Clientelism and Ethiopia's post-1991 decentralisation"; Crawford's work in Ghana which finds decentralisation effective in consolidating the power of national state, "Making democracy a reality? The politics of decentralisation and the limits to local democracy in Ghana"; and more general large-N studies which find a lower success in decentralisation initiatives in post-conflict contexts than elsewhere, Lake and Rothchild, "Territorial decentralisation and civil war settlements"; Siegle and O'Mahoney "Assessing the Merits of Decentralisation as a Conflict Mitigation Strategy".

³⁵ Republic of Rwanda, *National Decentralisation Policy*, 4.

³⁶ Republic of Rwanda, *National Decentralisation Policy*, 8.

³⁷ Interview state representative, 12/02/2013.

³⁸ Republic of Rwanda, *Law No. 29/2005 of 31/12/2005*.

³⁹ Ingelaere, "The Ruler's Drum and the People's Shout".

⁴⁰ Newbury, "High Modernism at the Ground Level".

⁴¹ Interviews state representative, 12/02/2013 and national NGO 06/03/2013.

⁴² MINALOC, *Revised Decentralisation Policy*, 8.

⁴³ MINALOC, *Revised Decentralisation Policy*, 8, emphasis in original

⁴⁴ MINALOC, *Revised Decentralisation Policy*, 8, emphasis in original.

⁴⁵ MINALOC, *Revised Decentralisation Policy*, 8-9, emphasis in original.

⁴⁶ Republic of Rwanda, *Revised Community Development Policy*, 11.

⁴⁷ Republic of Rwanda, *Revised Community Development Policy*, 16.

⁴⁸ MINALOC, *Ubudehe to fight Poverty*, 1.

⁴⁹ Shah, "Participatory numbers, community decision making and policy design: The practice and potential of Ubudehe statistics in Rwanda", 53.

⁵⁰ The VUP programme funded by DfID targets low income households and provides cash transfers (direct and in return for work) and micro-credit facilities.

⁵¹ Lemarchand, *Burundi and Rwanda*; Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*.

⁵² Interview with representative of international development agency, Kigali, February 13th, 2013.

⁵³ See Government of Rwanda, *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2013–2018*.

⁵⁴ Interviews with Sector Executive Secretary, Site D, February 16th, 2013 and Sector Executive Secretary, Site F, February 24th, 2013.

⁵⁵ The principal function of the Sector *Etat Civile* officer is to 'regularise' or legalise common law marriages. Targets of 100% regularisation are included the *imihigos* of sectors visited.

⁵⁶ Burnet, "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda"; Debusscher and Ansoms, "Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda".

⁵⁷ Desroisier and Thomson, "Rhetorical legacies of leadership: projections of 'benevolent leadership' in pre-and post-genocide Rwanda", and IRDP, *Peace in Rwanda as perceived by Rwandans*, 83-84.

⁵⁸ See the ‘Africa Power and Politics Project’ (www.institutions-africa.org) and Gaynor, “A Nation in a Hurry” for more on these trends.

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